

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Making It Work

Department of Education

A Student's Story

It's All About Attitude

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From the moment you meet Nia Karmann and see her smile, it is obvious that she has a positive attitude. Kyle Sterner, Special Populations Counselor at Central Community College in Grand Island, describes Nia as, “smart, energetic, and an excellent self-advocate with a good uplifting attitude”. These are the things that define Nia, not her disability.

Nia has spina bifida. This refers to a cleft spine, which is an incomplete closure in the spinal column. The most severe form of spina bifida causes muscle weakness or paralysis below the area of the spine where the incomplete

closure occurs, loss of sensation below the cleft, and loss of control of bodily functions. For some individuals, fluid may build up and cause an accumulation of fluid in the brain (a condition known as hydrocephalus).

Nia reports that her biggest challenge with spina bifida is her lack of mobility. She walks with crutches, but sometimes has to use a wheelchair due to distance or safety reasons. Lack of mobility particularly poses problems in wintry or rainy weather. Nia paints a vivid picture of the challenges she faces by saying, “The handicapped parking spots are usually full of the snow that has been pushed off the rest of the lot. It is also very difficult to

carry my

belongings when walking because my hands are full of crutches. Imagine going through a buffet and not having your hands available to carry your plate. Handicapped restrooms can also pose a problem because the layouts vary so drastically. The handicapped stall is the most popular with everyone, including those who do not really need it.”

She continues, “Shopping is another challenge if the store chooses to put so much merchandise out that the aisles become too full. I cannot get close enough to the merchandise to shop. Many places do not have electric handicapped doors.”

Despite these challenges, Nia maintains her positive attitude. She says, “Most of the time I don’t mind the stares and extra attention if it is given positively, but there are times I would just like to blend in and be one of the crowd. I never get that opportunity.”

Blending in and being part of the crowd is difficult for most teens. For teens with a disability, this can be an almost impossible challenge. Nia recalls that she had many friends in elementary school, but many of them left her behind when they entered middle school. She says, “By the time we were in high school, it was as if I didn’t exist.”

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Nia Karmann

Accommodations in College

**Be prepared
to talk directly
with your
professors
about your
needs and
provide
concrete
examples of
what works
for you and
what doesn't.**

As a student with a disability considering college, it is important that you know about accommodations. In college, accommodations are supports and services provided on campus so that eligible students with disabilities have equal access and opportunity to benefit from classes, programs, and activities. Examples of accommodations that may be provided include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Modifications for testing (extended time, testing in a room with limited distractions, readers, etc.)
- Interpreters
- Textbooks or materials in an alternate format
- Alternate, accessible locations for classrooms and labs

A specific process must be followed in order to have accommodations approved and this process will vary from college to college. Documentation requirements will also vary depending upon the college and the disability. Although each college will have a different process, here are some general steps that need to be followed in order to receive accommodations. It is highly

recommended that you do this before you begin classes to avoid any delays in receiving needed services!

- **Contact the office on campus in charge of accommodations.** This is typically referred to as the Office for Students with Disabilities or a similar title.
- **Find out what the college's requirements are for documentation of disability.** You may be able to find this on the college website or you may need to request this information from the Office for Students with Disabilities.
- **Gather the required documentation,** keeping a copy for your records, as well as having one for the college.
- **Meet with the Disability Services Coordinator to discuss your accommodation needs.** Be prepared to talk about what accommodations you've used in the past, what has worked for you, and what you think you'll need in college. If you are determined eligible for accommodations, you will be given a letter that you can use to inform your professors of your needs. Remember, do this at the beginning of the term!

- **Be prepared to talk directly with your professors about your needs** and provide concrete examples of what works for you and what doesn't.
- **Stay in touch with the Disability Services Coordinator** so that the two of you can monitor how the accommodations are working for you. Changes may be necessary, so don't hesitate to ask.

It may help you to know that professors are required to keep all information regarding your disability and accommodations confidential. If you are having problems with a specific professor, be sure to work with your Disability Service Coordinator to resolve the issues.

Want to know more? There are many excellent resources available for you. You may wish to start by visiting this website: <http://www.going-to-college.org/overview/index.html>.

Produced by Virginia Commonwealth University, the site contains information about living college life with a disability. It's designed for high school students and provides video clips, activities and additional resources that can help you get a head start in planning for college.

*(Information for this article adapted from: **Going to College**, developed by Virginia Commonwealth University under a grant from the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education).*

go green

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or by calling 1-877-637-3422.



It's All About Attitude

... continued from page 1

Nia's family helped her work through these difficult years. She gives a lot of credit to them, noting the great support and love she receives from her mom, dad, and brother. The advice her mother, LeAnn, offers to other parents sums up the philosophy of the Karmann family. "You have to be there as a solid support all the time and be willing to make opportunities happen when no one else will. It takes many hours of listening and trying to work through the difficult times together as a family. Outside interests and clubs are of great importance, so the social life in high school is not as crucial in their lives. If high school is all you have, then the tragedies are bigger and more devastating."

Nia obviously followed her mother's advice. She played in the school band, sang in the high school choir, performed in high school musicals, took dance classes through the YWCA, and belonged to 4-H for ten years. It was through 4-H that she took up archery, learned to sew, and began to pursue her artistic interests. This led to discovering her talent and passion for photography. Nia worked with her family and many others over the years to develop a plan for life after high school. The list of those who assisted her includes Children's Hospital in Omaha, school nurses, Vocational Rehabilitation, and teachers and staff at Grand Island Northwest High School.

A critical piece of the plan for Nia's future was college. This created a whole new set of challenges, but as usual, Nia met these with a positive attitude. She and her family toured several colleges before deciding which was best for her. They analyzed physical barriers and checked out housing options on campus. Nia's first choice would have worked because the college was very willing to provide accommodations for her physical needs. However, they required students to take sixteen hours per semester, making it cost prohibitive

for her. When touring another campus, they were shuffled toward accessible ramps, while the tour guide and tour group left them behind. This did not leave them with a good impression!

Everything came together when they toured Central Community College (CCC) in Grand Island and met with Kyle Sterner. In his role as Special Populations Counselor, Kyle works with students with disabilities to ensure they receive the services and accommodations necessary to meet their needs on campus. Meeting with a representative in the Disability Services Office is a critical step for all students with disabilities when selecting a college.

Kyle recommends that all students with disabilities, whether or not they think they will need accommodations in college, meet with the Disability Services staff to discuss their disability. While students may not initially see a need for accommodations, Kyle notes that there may come a time in their college career when they find they are struggling due to barriers related to their disability. By making the early connection with this office and having the required documentation of their disability on file, accommodations may be put in place much more quickly. If they find they don't need the assistance, there is no harm done in having made this connection, as the information regarding their needs remains confidential.

Nia requires only a few accommodations related to accessibility to attend college. With her mobility issues, it is helpful for Nia that the classes at CCC are held in one building and on one level. She receives assistance from various people in getting her and her possessions in and out of the building. This is particularly helpful in bad weather, when someone meets her at her car to assist with her wheelchair so that she doesn't fall. Kyle notes that Nia is an excellent self-advocate and is not afraid to tell others what she needs. The compliments go both ways, as Nia says that Kyle is an awesome advisor and that the entire staff is very friendly.

The additional advantage of attending CCC for Nia is that she is able to live at

home. This is less costly and has eased the stress of the transition to college. She hopes to eventually move into an apartment of her own within two years. This plan fits with the advice she offers to other youth with disabilities, as she recommends changing only one thing at a time. She advises that they don't try to do everything at once, such as moving out and going to college, unless they are absolutely sure they're ready and have good supports in place.

Not one to wait around for things to happen, Nia has already started on her career path. In addition to working on her Business major and participating in many campus activities at CCC, she has recently started her own photography business. With an impressive portfolio of photos, an outgoing personality, and her "can-do" attitude, she is sure to be a success!

**Meeting
with a
representative
in the
Disability
Services
Office is
a critical
step for all
students with
disabilities
when
selecting a
college.**

Focus on Employment:

Employers Speak

Who knows better than employers what it takes to be successful on the job? Representatives from Nebraska employers have shared their suggestions for success to be passed along to you. Check out the advice this employer has for students as they enter the workplace.

- Show up on time!
- Always give 110% and never leave until the job is done.
- Be a team player. Always be willing to pitch in a helping hand, even if it's not your job.
- Have a good attitude. Be the kind of person you would want to work with!

This excellent advice was provided by:

Heather Hersom
Employment Manager

AMERISTAR
CASINO ★ HOTEL

New Self-Advocacy Resource is Here!

Self-advocacy refers to the ability of a person to understand and explain his or her disability, strengths, and challenges. It is the ability to ask for help when it is needed. The self-advocacy movement was started by and for people with disabilities because they wanted to speak for themselves rather than having others speak for them. Strong self-advocacy skills are important for all, and particularly for those individuals with disabilities, in order to be successful in school and in the adult world.

A Self-Advocacy Committee, composed of Nebraska professionals, was formed by the Nebraska Department of Education several years ago to identify ways to assist transition-age students in acquiring self-advocacy skills. The Committee stresses that the teaching of self-advocacy is not limited to the classroom and is not just the responsibility of teachers, but rather is most effective when incorporated into everyday activities and practices.

A folder has been developed that highlights information identified by the Self-Advocacy Committee as helpful on this important topic.

This folder is posted on the web at: <http://sites.esu9.org:8000/Frontier/NDEtransition/SelfAdvocacyFolder.pdf>. If you are unable to access this on-line, you may call Lindy Foley at 402-471-4318 to request a copy.

Additionally, as new materials are identified that may be used for developing self-advocacy skills, they will

be posted to the Nebraska Department of Education's Transition website at: <http://sites.esu9.org:8080/NDEtransition/>. Click on the Self-Advocacy link. And, while you're there, check out the many other valuable resources posted on the Transition site! Check it regularly, as new information is routinely posted.

For More Information:

Contact the
State Vocational
Rehabilitation Office
in Lincoln at
1-402-471-3644
or toll free at
1-877-637-3422.

You may obtain
information on the
Voc Rehab Service
Office in your area by
calling these numbers
or accessing the
Service Office listing
on the web at:
[http://www.vr.ne.gov/
offices/index.html](http://www.vr.ne.gov/offices/index.html)

About this Publication

This publication, produced by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, is intended for students with disabilities and their families. The next issue, Volume #34 is scheduled for distribution in the fall of 2010.

Please contact us if you:

- Would like additional copies of this publication.
- Have questions or would like more details about any of the information contained in this issue.
- Have a success story you'd like to share with us.
- Have suggestions for topics for future issues.
- Wish to be removed from the mailing list for this publication.

To view previous issues of this or other Vocational Rehabilitation publications, or to receive a free subscription to these publications, go to: <http://www.vr.ne.gov:4000/subscribe>.

You may also contact the Vocational Rehabilitation State Office toll free at 1-877-NE-REHAB (1-877-637-3422) to receive these publications.

Additional Resources

If you have questions or concerns about services from Vocational Rehabilitation or are looking for additional disability resources, contact the Hotline for Disability Services/Client Assistance Program at **1-800-742-7594** or in Lincoln at **402-471-0801** or e-mail Victoria at: victoria.rasmussen@nebraska.gov.

